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AUTHOR Alfiorov, Vladimir Mikhailovich; Borodkin, Fridrikh Markovich
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ABSTRACT

A game ("Personal Plans of Youth") simulating the opportunities and restraints operative in the "implementation" of a life career was used to examine the attitudes of 14-15 year-old youth attending a comprehensive school in the Novosibirsk province of the USSR. The game incorporated the following five units or groups of restraints: (1) learning activity (over 50 learning institutions restrained via location, type, and governing rules); (2) working activity (50 jobs restrained via location, migration potential, educational requirements, age and sex, working hours, and initial and maximum wage); (3) family (restrained via age of husband, housework time, marital status, number of children, and community type and size); (4) leisure (restrained via sleep, work, learning, housework, and community type); (5) migration (restrained via learning institution, training quality, system of jobs, organization of services, transport, leisure, and subsistence minimum). While there were similar attitudes toward obtaining middle and vocational/technical training, marrying early, and having a large family, players tended to either want to complete urban vocational training and remain in the city working in industry or complete junior college training and return to the country. The game revealed that both alternatives presented problems in terms of value orientations, job availability, and rate of industrialization. (JC)

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V.M. Alfiorov

F.M. Borodkin

YOUTH ATTITUDES STUDIED
BY SIMULATION GAMES

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*Seminary: Rural Youth: Human
Resource or Human Burden?*

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V.M. Alfiorov
P.M. Borodkin

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Abstract

The paper examines a method for studying some attitudes of urban and rural youth with the help of a simulation game "Personal Plans of Youth" constructed just for this purpose. Methodological and substantive results of the first experiments are given.

1. Introduction

The role the youth will play in the future development of society depends on goals they are striving at, on degree to which these goals are consistent with the objective developmental trends and tasks solved by the society and on whether there are conditions for their implementation. In case the goals of youth are inconsistent with societal opportunities and do not correspond to objective living conditions of its members, the youth is a source for future conflicts and the nature of the mentioned inconsistency permits us to have some judgements about the directions in which the society may be reconstructed.

In our view, the main items on which the plans of the youth must correspond to objective conditions of the society regulating the life activity of its members are:

- 1) educational attainments planned by the youth and the existing system of learning institutions;
- 2) occupational aspirations and system of jobs;
- 3) marital plans of the youth and objective opportunities to create a family and to give birth to children (provision

of dwellings, children's institutions, the state of services, economic well-being);

4) youth orientations in the area of leisure activities and leisure organization, sports, creative activity.

The violation of this consistence results in learning institutions with one one to study in, youth having no opportunity of getting education it strives at, job vacancies with no one to fill and youth without satisfactory jobs, in decline of birth rate and of number of young families, increase of delinquency. And, the other way round, if the society succeeds not only to foresee the aspirations and needs of the youth but to prepare itself to new generations entering the life, it will develop in more harmonious way.

In order to achieve this, it is necessary, above all, to have valid information about the plans of the youth, to foresee beforehand possible contradictions and means of preventing from them, through adequately influencing the youth, on the one hand, and possibly on the objective life conditions, on the other.

The objective of the study the present paper can be briefly summarized in the following way: study of plans and attitudes of the youth in the field of education, family creation and leisure, the evaluation of their consistency with objective conditions in the contemporary socialist society, as well as the comparison of this correspondence for rural and urban youth, the answer to the question what problems arise for both groups and how these groups could respond to particular changes in social conditions.

We proceed upon an assumption that in the process of socialization or preparation to the life in society, in the minds of the youth two processes are taking place. The first one is an ever more complete but also more narrow and somewhat distorted reflection of those objective opportunities which are given to the youth by the society, and the second, the formation of a system of values accord-

ing to which some decisions and versions are given preference comparing to others, i.e. to implement a specific choice of life career. Possibilities to get education, job residence, means of creating family, spending one's leisure time are so wide in a mature society that no one can consider all versions in sufficient detail. In reality the youth starting its life career considers some of possible alternatives in detail and others in less detail. We can suppose that "worked out" or contemplated are more preferable variants of life careers, and preferable variants are those which are better known. From this it follows a hypothesis that life plans of different groups of youth must be essentially differentiated according to concrete conditions of their socialization, in particular, for rural and urban youth.

2. The Game "Personal Plans of the Youth"

In order to answer the above questions we suggest using a simulation game which is a new and a peculiar instrument for social study. Its prototype is S. Bookcock's game "Life Career". Our game which is a highly abstract description of opportunities rendered by society to an individual, a kind of statistical labyrinth of rules and restraints imposed on his behaviour. The meaning of the game is that the player (a respondent) is asked to compose and "implement" a life career as a trajectory within the suggested labyrinth.

The game consists of five units (groups of restraints): learning activity, working activity, family, leisure, migration. The unit of learning has a description of 50 actually existing learning institutions ranging from comprehensive school to university. Each learning institutions is characterized by:

- 1) types of communities where they or similar institutions are located;
- 2) rules for entrance and level of education necessary for entering them;

- 3) rules determining performance depending on abilities and time spent on preparation;
- 4) rules for giving stipends and places in hostels;
- 5) rules for job placements;
- 6) months and years of learning;
- 7) acquired occupation.

The unit of jobs has descriptions of about 200 groups of actually existing occupations joined into 50 gaming occupations. Every job is marked by:

- 1) types of communities where it can exist and opportunities for migration without changing the occupation;
- 2) necessary level of special and general education;
- 3) age and sex restraints;
- 4) possible pattern of working hours;
- 5) initial and maximum wages as well as annual rates of their growth.

The unit of family consists of the rule determining (in a stochastic sense) the age of the future husband and his income. This unit sets the necessary minimum time for housework, depending on sex, marital status, number of children, type of community in which the player plans to live.

The time left from sleep, learning, work, housework is considered free. In the game described are ways of spending it, different for identified types of communities.

And finally migration. In the game described are six types of communities spread in the eastern part of the U.S.S.R. ranging from a small village to a large city. Each type is characterized by:

- 1) set of learning institutions;
- 2) quality of training specialists;
- 3) system of jobs;
- 4) organization of services, transport, leisure;
- 5) subsistence minimum.

Decisions made by players in each of the enumerated spheres are associated with each other. For example, a player: a college student, has to spend on learning

60-70 hours per week; to have income about 70-80 roubles a month and to spend on housework about 10 hours a week. If, under these conditions, he wants to have family, his time expenditures on housework will increase up to 20 hours a week, income must increase up to 150-170 roubles per month (for the two of them). If the summary income of the player and his wife is less than that, he must, within the game framework, earn money he is short of. This can be done only by taking on a job, i.e. at the expense of additional time expenditures taken from leisure or from housework. This often leads to that the player has lower performance, is devoid of stipend and gets into even a more difficult situation. An attempt at rectifying his situation by additional work may lead to that the player will not be able to get higher learning at all and will remain for a long time a low skilled worker. The game is abundant in such interconnections of income, time, education, occupation and community type which simulate actual connections observed in reality.

3. Simulation Game as an Instrument for Sociological Survey

A distinctive feature of the game as an instrument for sociological survey is that the respondent's replies about his intentions in different life spheres are, first, necessarily coordinated with each other, since while making particular decisions the respondent is forced to take into account restraints in related spheres of activity which will be faced in the implementation of his plan. Second, the game result is more than the ultimate status achieved by the player before a conventional age of 25 years, but also the path to this status, or trajectory of player's movement in social space.

On the other hand, the game permits one to test the achievability of life plans of youth before their practical implementation. We have staged the following experiment.

In one group, while conducting the game, we did not tell the respondents about income restraints. According to this, it was allowed in the game that there might exist families with arbitrary level of incomes. It was revealed that the players mostly planned their behaviour by themselves, so as the restraint of which they were unaware was fully satisfied. Such experiments allow us to detect which of the restraints the players were informed of before the game, and which they got to know only during it. This enables us to judge about the degree to which the groups of youth under study are prepared for real functioning in the given society.

The game permits one to find out how personal plans and behaviour of youth will change after changing certain rules of the game. Due to this, an opportunity emerges to answer such questions, for example, as, if sphere of services begins to work better and necessary housework is reduced, will it lead to growth in the number of young families, to higher birth rates or not? If the network of educational institutions changes and new junior and senior colleges arise, will there be those who desire to study in them? If the policy of enrolment to higher learning institutions changes and rural residents are given substantial advantages for getting higher education, will this solve, at least in the future, the problem of providing the rural side with highly qualified manpower?

One of the game results is finding out intragroup balance of conjugal plans of the youth, in particular, at what age, at what income and education would the girls like to get married, what bridegrooms they would like to have and whether their desires are in harmony with the attitudes of young men or not.

The experiment with the game permits one to study also problems associated with social mobility of the youth. For this end, it is necessary to make an experimental group of children whose parents have about the same social status, and then to detect their personal plans and status they would like to obtain. In this way we can find out the subjective aspect of the reproduction of this group in the

subsequent generation. The game permits one to find out some mechanisms of social mobility with the help of the following experiment also. Groups of members from two different social groups are taken. First the members of each group make personal plans for themselves. Then they are asked to simulate in the game the behaviour of a member of the opposite group and to evaluate the implemented line of behaviour and the achieved status. In this situation possible are different combinations of good and poor simulations and different evaluations. Such combinations will indicate the dominance of particular mechanisms of reproduction. For example, the simulation is good but the evaluation is low. This indicates the group reproduction on the basis of high socialization and sharply conservative system of values. Another example, just poor simulation and no pronounced evaluations - reproduction on the basis of incomplete ideas about opportunities rendered by society, on the basis of incomplete socialization. And so on.

These are only part of tasks which can be solved with the help of the simulation game "Personal Plans of the Youth".

4. Some Results of Game Experiments

The suggested work has been so far of methodological nature. Nonetheless, even at this stage we succeeded in getting some substantive results too.

Experiments have been conducted in villages of the Novosibirsk province with 14-15 year old school children, pupils of the eighth grade of comprehensive school. Under Soviet conditions these are maximum grown up respondents who at the same time have not yet made a single independent decision in the sphere of learning, work or family. In the course of the experiments it has been found out that the rural youth considers mainly only two life alternatives, which are in some respects similar to and in others

different from each other. Similar elements characterizing most stable and popular attitudes of rural youth are those toward getting middle- and vocational-technical training as well as early marriage and creation of a large family. The difference is that one group of youth intends to complete urban vocational schools, to be employed in manufacturing and live in city, and the other to complete a junior college in city, come back to a rural place and be employed in agriculture.

The former group stands out as a reserve of urban industry and services, as manpower for future industrial growth. And they are striving to fill those places where there is the highest deficiency of labour. At the same time, the analysis of the game results shows that in the implementation of life plans by this part of rural youth many difficulties inevitably arise. Firstly, mass inflow of this youth to city entails difficulties with dwellings and services. Secondly, coming to city this group of youth will find out that employment spheres chosen by them (transport, services, trade), educational level and family model do not correspond to social norms and value orientations of those groups of urban population which they would like to join. These young people inevitably will face the problem of adaptation to urban values and behavioural norms.

On the basis of the second group of youth the reproduction of highly and middle-skilled rural manpower is possible which is important for further intensification of agricultural production. But the implementation of their life plans cannot be automatical either. Toward the moment when this group completes education agriculture must prepare a sufficient number of high- and middle-skilled jobs. The fates of youth who decided to live in the countryside much depend on rates of industrialization in agriculture, on the policy of capital investment to it.

In principle, the socialist society has all necessary conditions for providing high and steady rates of the development of agriculture and manufacturing and at the

same time of complete enough implementation of personal plans by rural youth. Further study of these plans and values underlying them may be conducive, in our view, to the improvement in methods of social control over society.

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Fridrikh Markovich Borodkin

Alfiorov Vladimir Mikhailovich

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L.A. Khakhulina

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